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CIA AGENTS HELPED MIG PILOT DEFECT

BY P.Y. CHEN

TOKYO (UPI) -- THE DEFECTION OF A SOVIET PILOT IN A TOP-SECRET MIG 25 "FOXBAT" JET FIGHTER FIVE YEARS AGO WAS ENGINEERED BY CIA AGENTS IN MOSCOW, A NEWS REPORT SAID SUNDAY.

JAPAN'S KYODO NEWS AGENCY, QUOTING INTELLIGENCE SOURCES, SAID THE CIA MASTERMINDED THE FLIGHT TO FREEDOM BY LT. VIKTOR BELENKO, WHO FLEW THE SOPHISTICATED FOXBAT TO THE NORTHERNMOST MAIN ISLAND OF HOKKAIDO IN SEPTEMBER 1976.

THE EVENT GAVE U.S. AERONAUTICS EXPERTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE THE RUSSIANS' TOP-SECRET INTERCEPTOR PLANE.

THE AIRCRAFT, WHICH FLIES AT THREE TIMES THE SPEED OF SOUND, WAS DESCRIBED BY THEN SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT SEAMANS AS "PROBABLY THE BEST INTERCEPTOR IN PRODUCTION IN THE WORLD TODAY."

DESPITE VEHEMENT PROTESTS AND A DEMAND BY THE KREMLIN FOR ITS IMMEDIATE RETURN, THE AIRCRAFT WAS NOT SHIPPED BACK BY SEA UNTIL TWO MONTHS LATER AFTER IT WAS TAKEN APART FOR PHOTOGRAPHING AND CAREFUL EXAMINATION BY U.S. AIR FORCE EXPERTS.

KYODO SAID PILOT BELENKO WAS APPROACHED IN A MOSCOW BAR IN OCTOBER 1974 BY AN AGENT OF MI-6, THE BRITISH INTELLIGENCE AGENCY.

FOR TWO TO THREE MONTHS AFTER THAT INITIAL CONTACT, BELENKO HELD SECRET MEETINGS WITH WESTERN SPIES -- INCLUDING CIA AGENTS -- UNTIL HIS TRANSFER TO THE SOVIET UNION'S FAR EAST BASE IN SIKHAROVKA.

DURING THE MEETINGS, PLANS WERE MADE FOR THE PILOT'S DARING FLIGHT TO JAPAN, THE NEWS AGENCY SAID.

IN RETURN FOR FLYING A MIG 25 IN PERFECT CONDITION TO JAPAN, THE WESTERN AGENTS GUARANTEED BELENKO "A PROTECTED, FREE LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES," KYODO SAID.

BELENKO'S "FOXBAT" LANDED AT HAKODATE AIRPORT ON SEPT. 6, 1976. UNTIL HE WAS FLOWN TO THE UNITED STATES THREE DAYS LATER AND GRANTED POLITICAL ASYLUM, BELENKO UNDERWENT INTERROGATION BY JAPANESE AUTHORITIES WHO DECIDED THE PILOT'S FLIGHT TO FREEDOM WAS "AT HIS OWN VOLITION."

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LAST SEPTEMBER, THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE PASSED A SPECIAL BILL MAKING BELENKO AN AMERICAN CITIZEN AND CITED HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE COUNTRY.

UNHAPPINESS OVER SLOW PROMOTION IN THE SOVIET AIR FORCE APPEARED TO HAVE MOTIVATED BELENKO TO DEFECT TO THE WEST, KYODO SAID.

WESTERN SECRET AGENTS DECIDED TO APPROACH HIM WHEN THEY DETECTED BELENKO'S DISSCONTENTMENT, WHICH INCLUDED MATRIMONIAL DISHARMONY, THE NEWS AGENCY SAID.

COMMENTING ON THE KYODO REPORT, JAPAN'S DEFENSE AGENCY OFFICIALS SAID THEY HAD NO PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF CIA INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEFECTION.

BUT ONE OFFICIAL QUOTED BY KYODO SAID, 'BUT I RECALL THE SPEEDY ARRIVAL OF AMERICAN EXPERTS WHO FLEW INTO JAPAN ONLY 10 HOURS AFTER THE MIG 25'S TOUCH DOWN (IN JAPAN).'

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